

INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION  
IN IRELAND.

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A LETTER

TO

SIR J. BERNARD BURKE, C.B., ULSTER,

FROM

LORD RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL, M.P.

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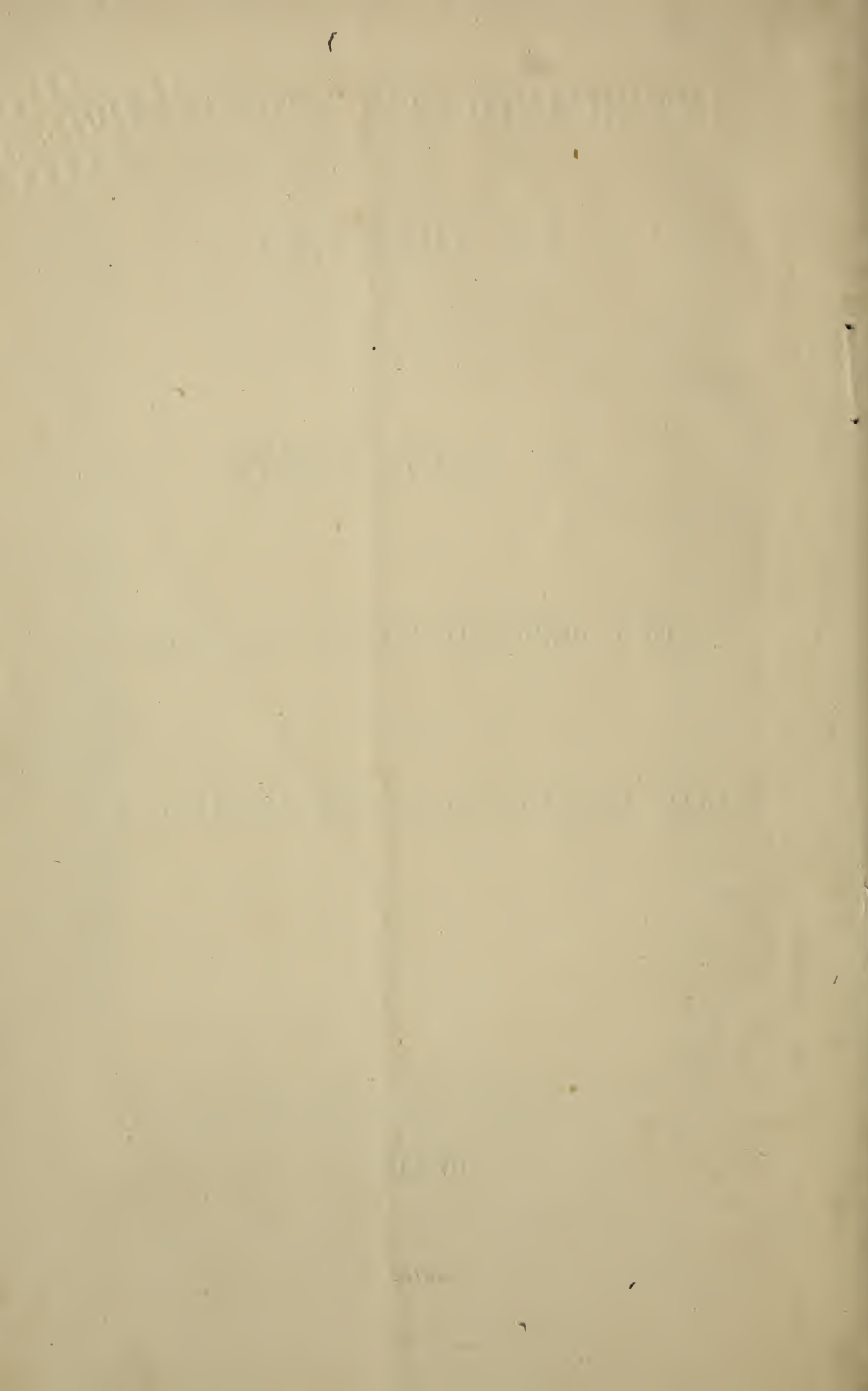
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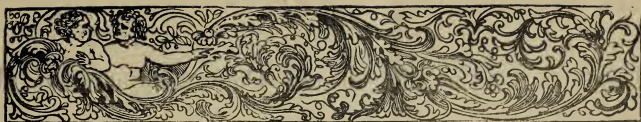
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1878.





DEAR SIR BERNARD BURKE,

As it was chiefly owing to a conversation with you, some months ago, that my attention was directed to the state of Intermediate Education in Ireland, I now proceed according to agreement to communicate to you the results of my inquiries.

It may not be altogether superfluous that I should impress upon you that the suggestions which I advocate in this letter are made entirely on my own responsibility as a private member of Parliament, totally unconnected with the Irish Government.

You have, I know, for a long time taken a deep interest in this question.

Few men have a more intimate acquaintance with the sentiments of the Catholic community on the subject of education than yourself.

Any attempt, moreover, at legislation on the question of intermediate education in Ireland, without being in possession of those sentiments, would be rash and ill-advised.

The sources whence I have drawn most of my information are—the Reports of the Royal Commission on Endowed Schools (Ireland), appointed in 1854; of the Royal Commission on Primary Education (Ireland),

appointed in 1867 ; and of the Commissioners of the Census, 1871.

No one, I think, who has studied the Report of the Commission on Endowed Schools, can refrain from wonder that the attention of Parliament has never yet been directed in any way to its consideration.

The history, the objects, and the value of those endowments on the one hand, their comparative exclusiveness and unproductiveness, the waste, mismanagement, and general misapprehension of duties on the part of the managers of those endowments on the other hand, combine to render this fact very remarkable, that twenty years should have been suffered to elapse without any attempt at legislative reform.

This is the more striking when we consider what has been the action of Parliament with reference to the Public Schools and the Endowed Schools of England. Those institutions have been thoroughly, not to say radically remodelled, and their endowments redistributed, and placed in a condition which enables them to be of the highest utility as regards the intermediate education of the youth of England.

I propose in this letter to deal, first, with the state of intermediate education in Ireland at the present time ; secondly, to offer some suggestions as to the best means of establishing a national system of intermediate education on a sound and enduring basis. And, thirdly, to inquire from what sources funds may be drawn for the support of such a system, and also how far existing endowments may be utilized and comprehended in any scheme.

First.—As to the state of intermediate education in Ireland at the present time.

According to the Report of the Census Commissioners for 1871, the number of persons receiving superior instruction in Ireland at that time was 24,170. In 1861 it was 24,311, showing that superior instruction in Ireland, as far as regards numbers, is declining. These figures comprise all classes of superior instruction, from the pupil who is being taught one modern language, to the undergraduate of Trinity. If we separate University from secondary education, we find that of persons between the ages of five and fifteen in 1871, there were 16,931 receiving superior instruction, or 13·4 of every thousand persons between those ages. Comment on such figures as these is quite unnecessary. They are almost incredible, and they are a reproach and a shame, not only to Ireland, but to the United Kingdom.

The educational establishments of a secondary nature in 1861, numbered 729, and they were attended by 21,674 pupils. In 1871 these numbers had fallen to 574, attended by 21,225 pupils, exhibiting a decline of 155 in the number of schools, and 449 in the number of pupils.

To use the very temperate words of the Census Commissioners, these figures argue “something worse than mere stagnation.” No one interested in the future of Ireland can doubt that immediate legislation on the subject is absolutely imperative.

What would be the best method of stimulating higher instruction in Ireland? In my opinion it cannot be denied that the task will be, not merely stimulation of existing institutions, but the actual creation of new ones.



I should propose to effect this by an extension of the system of Royal Free Grammar Schools. This proposal is based on the recommendations of a Royal Commission of the Irish Parliament of 1791, and of a Committee of the House of Commons of 1838.

This latter recommended "the establishment of an academy for classics and science for each county in Ireland, the existing schools of public foundation to be used as far as they were available, and new schools to be established only where the existing endowments were insufficient."

That this would be a system of intermediate education under the direct control and management of the State, and that grave objections to such a system are entertained by many of the best authorities on education, I am well aware. But as regards Ireland, the following arguments may be used in its favour.

The comparative poverty of the great majority of the inhabitants, the Roman Catholic portion of which is already highly taxed for the support of religious, charitable, and educational establishments.

The Commissioners of 1858 came to the conclusion that there was no chance that the existing deficiencies as regarded intermediate education in Ireland, would be supplied by purely voluntary effort.

Again, there has existed in Ireland, ever since the days of Elizabeth, a system of intermediate education under the direct control and management of the State, and endowed by the State. I allude to the Diocesan Free Schools and the Royal Free Grammar Schools.

This system was mutilated by the Irish Church Act, the promoters of which (acting, no doubt, under a complete

misapprehension) treated the Diocesan Free Schools as sectarian institutions, the property of the Church, and allowed the schoolmasters to become annuitants on the Church Funds.

This question is an interesting one, but does not admit of being treated in detail in this letter.\* Suffice it to say that every Commission and Committee which has reported on these schools, has declared them to be essentially non-exclusive. They were not only not the property of the Church in any way, but the funds for their support were a direct tax upon the incomes of the diocesan clergy. The appointment of masters was in the gift of the Lord Lieutenant, and the erection and repairs of school buildings should have been, according to the original intention, and was in some cases, part of the county cess.

It is true that these institutions, as well as the Royal Free Grammar Schools, have never been in first rate working order. This is due, however, to the shameful mismanagement and neglect to which they have been continually subject, and not to any inherent faults in the institutions themselves. That this is so, can be proved by the fact, that successive inquiries have recommended the remodelling and extension of these institutions ; and also by the fact, that whenever an energetic and capable school-master has been appointed to any of them, that one has at once sprung up as useful and efficient.

I consider, therefore, that Parliament having inadvertently, no doubt, struck a blow at an existing system of intermediate education, which, if it had paid any atten-

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\* I have discussed this subject at some length in a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* of 31st December, 1877.

tion to the recommendations of its own commissions and committees, it should, on the contrary, have remodelled and extended, is bound to provide means for supplying deficiencies which Parliament itself created. This position is further strengthened by the fact that another indirect blow was struck at intermediate education in Ireland by the establishment of a national system of primary education, controlled and supported by the State. Before the establishment of this system there existed in Ireland, in almost every town, schools of private enterprise, in which higher instruction was given to some, elementary instruction to many pupils. The schools under the National Board have, however, put an end to nearly all these schools, by drawing away the pupils receiving elementary instruction. The evidence to this effect is copious and overwhelming, and I need not further allude to it.

I summarise the foregoing as follows:—A system of intermediate education under the direct control of the State, has been established in Ireland, ever since the days of Elizabeth. That system, it is true, cannot be said to have been at any time flourishing or efficient. But its deficiencies cannot be ascribed to any inherent defects in the system itself. That system has been interfered with by Parliament, by the action of the Irish Church Act: and the whole cause of intermediate education in Ireland has been injuriously affected by the action of the National Board. Taking into consideration, also, the figures quoted above, which prove such an extraordinary absence of higher education in Ireland, I think we may conclude that Parliament is not only bound to revive, remodel and reform the existing system of intermediate



education in Ireland, as represented by the Royal Free Schools, but is also bound to extend that system to all parts of Ireland, by providing and endowing new schools in localities where they are likely to be of the highest practical utility.

If this is admitted, the next and most difficult question for consideration is—How shall these schools, if established, be constituted so as to render them not only acceptable to, but sought after, by the vast majority of the Irish people ?

On this point I take, as the basis of any scheme, the argument of Mr. Hughes, a Roman Catholic member of the commission of 1858—"That the adoption by the State of the most correct theory on the subject of education, if unsuited to the condition of the country, and opposed to the religious convictions of the people, would have the effect of postponing the education of the classes it was intended to promote."

Shall the course of education pursued in these schools be of a strictly denominational character, or shall it be of the character best known as "mixed"?

The argument against education of a strictly denominational character is, that it would be perfectly impossible to obtain the assent of Parliament to a scheme of that character. It would be inviting Parliament to retrace ground already made good, and to revise and modify resolutions solemnly affirmed and re-affirmed.

The argument against a system of mixed education is, that it would be perfectly impossible to obtain the assent

of the Roman Catholic clergy and laity to any scheme of this nature. It would be asking the Roman Catholic clergy to accept what, in repeated councils, they have denounced. It would be asking the laity of that Church to make use of what their spiritual guides absolutely prohibit.

It may be argued that the Roman Catholics have accepted the system of mixed education, as far as regards elementary instruction. Such an argument, however, would be fallacious. They have never accepted the *principle* of mixed education. They have, undoubtedly, and with wisdom, allowed their flocks to make use of schools directly under the National Board, as long as instruction in those schools did not exceed the limits of elementary instruction; and further, as a set off, they have contrived to get grants of public money in aid of schools strictly denominational—as the schools of the Christian Brothers. The moment the instruction given by the National Board threatened to leave the limits of elementary, and reach the domains of secondary instruction (as in the case of the Model Schools and Training Schools), that instruction has been denounced, and Roman Catholics have been prohibited from making use of it.

It would be unavailing to argue against the convictions of the Roman Catholic hierarchy on this point. It would be useless to disregard those convictions, and attempt to legislate for the Roman Catholic laity; for the laity, I believe, fully endorse those convictions.

Is it, however, impossible to reconcile the resolutions of

Parliament and the convictions of the Roman Catholics? Must the cause of intermediate education be still further neglected? Must the children of the vast majority of the middle classes of Ireland be suffered to remain in this melancholy state of ignorance? Must Ireland be indefinitely condemned to suffer from a want of vitality and enterprise on account of this intellectual paralysis? And does the problem admit of no solution?

I apprehend that the principle Parliament could not be induced to depart from is as follows:—That no grants of public money shall be obtained by any religious sect for the purpose of teaching the religious tenets of that sect.

I apprehend that the objection Roman Catholics entertain to mixed education is, that in the course of instruction of youth it is impossible for a teacher to avoid instilling his own ideas of moral and religious responsibility into the minds of his pupils. The higher the instruction, the greater would be the difficulty; the more able the teacher, the more certain the effect. As, however, roughly speaking, three-fourths of the area of Ireland is inhabited by a purely Roman Catholic population—at least as regards the classes whose education we wish to promote—and as regards the remaining portion, the population is principally non-Catholic, I would lay down the following rule—That where the great proportion of the population is Roman Catholic in any locality where a school is established, the schoolmaster appointed should be a Roman Catholic,—where the proportion is non-Catholic, there the schoolmaster should be a Protestant.

It may be objected that this simple regulation would

not secure the support of either religious sect. I conceive that it would in a great measure. The schools would be managed by a Board, composed of persons of either religion, Protestant or Roman Catholic, and it would be the first object of the Board to make these schools efficient. To do so it must appoint schoolmasters who would possess the confidence of the Roman Catholics generally, and particularly of those of the locality in which the school is situate. The same argument would apply to localities in which the Protestant population might be predominant.

It would, however, be essential in all schools under the Board, with respect to religious instruction, to have a conscience clause in their rules. With that safeguard, and considering that the Board would have no object in proselytizing, and would be composed of gentlemen who would have the complete confidence of the public, I conceive that the people would fearlessly accept the immense advantages offered to them by schools so constituted.

In the practical working of this scheme, schools in Roman Catholic localities would have Catholic masters, and would attract only Catholic children. In Protestant localities they would have Protestant masters, and would attract only Protestant children. There would be special means, to which I shall refer later, of providing higher instruction for Protestant children in Roman Catholic localities, and *vice versa*.

Precautions should be taken to prevent these schools becoming, in any way, Ecclesiastical schools, which are not required by either religious body (sufficient of these



being already in existence and adequately supported), and the masters should be laymen.

The course of instruction, and the extent to which religious instruction should be given, are matters which should be settled by fixed rules, drawn up by the Board, and submitted for the approval of the Government.

Religious instruction should take place at fixed hours, and not be allowed to take up an undue amount of the time of the pupils, or be forced upon an unwilling pupil. The masters would receive no extra pay from the State for giving it. There would be no public examinations in it. It should be a matter to be left to arrangement between master and parent, subject to the rules of the School.

In any scheme of this nature many loopholes are left for adverse criticism. They are unavoidable. Looking, however, at the whole matter broadly; at the immense importance to Ireland of providing the means of secondary instruction for its youth; at the utter absence of such means at the present moment, I firmly believe that a scheme of this nature might be made to work with great success, and that it would not infringe either the resolutions of Parliament, or violate the convictions of Protestant or Roman Catholic. It would certainly be the object of the Government to make it work—it would be the object of the Board to make it work—and it would be the object of Irish parents to take advantage of such a scheme. When all parties concerned are so deeply interested, and when they are all agreed as to their object, success cannot be unattainable.

Would these schools, if established, interfere with existing schools, either Protestant or Roman Catholic? I

think they would not. As regards Roman Catholic existing schools, where the expenses of procuring higher instruction are low, these schools are nearly all of them seminaries intended for the training of youth for the service of the Church. With respect to secondary schools of private enterprise, they attract a different and a higher class of pupils than that which these new schools would be intended to attract. The classes that would frequent the schools I propose are the middle classes, and particularly what may be called the lower middle, for whom the Endowed Schools were originally founded, and who have at the present moment in Ireland absolutely no means of procuring higher instruction for their children.

It must be borne in mind that at all the Royal schools, and at all the Erasmus Smith's schools, the fees for tuition range from £65 to £40 per annum.

I do not suppose that these schools, though intended for the gratuitous education of the middle classes, are educating at the present moment, in all, one hundred free pupils.

To what extent should education in these schools be gratuitous? The objection to absolutely gratuitous education is, that many parents are unwilling to be indebted to a charity; and that they think their children are placed in an inferior position with regard to the other pupils in the school, who might be paying for their education. I think that the object of the schools should be primarily to afford gratuitous instruction; but I would obviate the objection above stated by making such instruction the prize of competitive examinations. This plan has been tried with great success by the schools under the Incor-

porated Society—its adoption in the Royal Schools was strongly recommended by the Commissioners of 1854, and 1867. Gratuitous education, gained as the reward of industry and superior knowledge and ability, is a source of pride to parent and pupil.

Public examinations, therefore, for vacant places, should be held at the locality in which the school may be situate; examinations should be held by deputations from the Board, in all large towns, and the parents of pupils gaining the first places should be allowed to select the school at which they wish their children to be educated, under certain restrictions.

Thus Protestant children would be able to gain places in Protestant schools, and Roman Catholic children in Roman Catholic schools. In this manner I would place in the grasp of Protestant and Roman Catholic children, residing respectively in Catholic and Protestant localities, the means of procuring higher instruction without danger to their religious convictions.

Promising children at National elementary schools, by competition at these examinations, would have the means of obtaining higher instruction and raising in the world. There are absolutely no facilities for anything of the kind in Ireland at the present moment.

I would not attach senior exhibitions to any of these schools exclusively. The Board, according to this plan, would hold half-yearly examinations, either in Dublin, or in the large towns and centres of population, where exhibitions tenable in any of the higher educational institutions in the United Kingdom—*e.g.*, the Universities, the Royal, Military, and Naval Academies, Colleges of Science,

Art, Theological Colleges, and Schools of Medicine and Surgery—should be competed for by candidates from any school in Ireland—Protestant, Roman Catholic, or otherwise.

I do not think these exhibitions should exceed £75 per annum, or be tenable for more than four years. They should be tenable under conditions forcing the holder to pursue actively a course of education, and none should be of less value than £30 per annum.

I will advert to facilities for junior Exhibitions later.

One more question—should these schools be boarding-schools, or day-schools only? I think they should be both.

The under masters at the schools might be permitted by the Board, on the recommendation of the head master, to receive a certain number of boarders at fixed and limited charges. It would be better that the head master should not himself receive boarders; he should be able to attend to the interests of each pupil impartially; his salary should be such as would render it no object to him to increase his emoluments by receiving boarders, and such also as would attract men of superior attainments.

With regard to day scholars, the children of parents residing in the immediate locality of the school should be allowed to avail themselves of its advantages, and yet remain under the parental roof.

No difficulty as to religious instruction could arise with reference to day pupils, for parents could see to the education of their children in that branch of instruction themselves.

The number of free pupils at each school would, of course, be limited—the remainder of the pupils would



pay for the instruction they receive, at rates to be fixed by the Board, who would receive the fees.

I have sketched the principles of a scheme for a system of National Intermediate Education, under the control and management of, and endowed by the State.

Should these principles attract support, details, I believe, might be supplied without serious difficulty.

The question that remains for consideration is an inquiry as to the sources whence endowments for these schools should be derived ; and how far existing endowments might be utilized. I will deal with the latter part first,

The Royal Schools—six in number—would, of course, be immediately transferred to the control of the new Board. Their endowments amount to about £7,000 per annum, arising from land ; but this sum is unequally divided amongst the schools. These endowments were not considered by the Commissioners of 1854 to be excessive, or more than was required for the proper support of the Schools.

There are or were in 1858 seventeen Grammar Schools, of private foundation, under the management of the Commissioners of Education, possessing endowments amounting to £1,668 per annum, also derived from landed estates. It is impossible to discover, from the Annual Reports of the Commissioners of Education, how many of these schools are now in operation, or what is being done with the endowments. These schools would be transferred to the new Board, who would have power to suppress schools situated in localities where they are likely to be inoperative, and to add their endowments to schools more favourably situated. An annual income of £1,668 is manifestly

quite inadequate for the support of seventeen schools of secondary instruction.

With respect to the Commissioners of Education for Endowed Schools appointed in 1815, who at present have the management of the schools alluded to above, I should propose that this Body be dissolved. They have never understood the importance of the duties committed to them, and much of the deplorable deficiency in higher instruction in Ireland must be laid directly at their door. The dissolution of this Body was strongly recommended by the Commissioners of 1854.

Of endowments that cannot be said to be managed satisfactorily, or to be working efficiently, and might perhaps with advantage be placed under the control of the new Board, I would suggest those founded by Erasmus Smith. Very strong arguments might be adduced in support of this suggestion.

The schools under the government of Erasmus Smith have, up to the present time, been schools of an exclusive character. If transferred to the new Board they would of course become of a non-exclusive character. I find that this endowment at present maintains five grammar schools, and about one hundred and fifty elementary schools.

The former might be transferred to the new Board, together with so much of the property as may be considered necessary for their proper support.

The elementary schools might be handed over to the National Board.

They should, I think be dealt with by the National Board on the following principle :—That in localities where they exist in competition with schools of the

National Board, they should be suppressed, and their endowments applied for the purposes of Junior Exhibitions for the children of the locality. In localities where these schools exist, and where there are no schools under the National Board, they should become non-exclusive National Schools vested in the National Board—their endowments also being applied for the purposes of Junior Exhibitions.

There are several other endowments existing in Ireland applicable to educational purposes. ; chief among these is the property, or, at least, a large portion of the property, of the Irish Society.

Simultaneously with the establishment of the new Board I have so often alluded to, a Royal Commission on ~~Endowment~~<sup>ed</sup> Schools (Ireland) should be issued with precisely similar powers to those of the Endowed Schools (England) Commission. They should be empowered to inquire into, remodel, and re-distribute all existing educational endowments ; to transfer any, or all of them, to the control and management of the new Board. Their proposals would, of course, have to receive the approval of Parliament.

Further, where endowments, derived from landed estates are transferred to the new Board, the management of those estates should be given over to the Irish Church Temporalities Commission, with instructions that they are to be sold as advantageously as possible (existing tenants of those estates having all possible facilities afforded them for purchase) and the proceeds invested in Government Stock.

It is, in my opinion most undesirable that any Board, having the management of educational interests, should have its time taken up in any way with the management of landed estates. The inefficiency of the Commissioners of Education must be attributed, in a very great degree, to the fact that their principal care was the management of extensive estates situated in various parts of Ireland.

The income arising from the proceeds of the sale of these estates would, of course, be under the management of the new Board, who would distribute them equally and indifferently among the several schools under their care. The accounts should be annually audited by a Government auditor, and an annual Report made to Parliament.

How far these endowments would go towards establishing and supporting the necessary schools, it would be difficult with any accuracy to determine. There can be no doubt, however, that a large additional sum of money would be required to carry out the scheme I have laid before you in its entirety. Fortunately there is no need to look to grants of public money as a source from which such funds must be derived. A large fund exists, peculiarly the property of Ireland, and which may in all justice be applied, either in part or as a whole, to the higher educational requirements of the Irish people. I allude to the surplus property of the Disestablished Irish Church.

The time has arrived, when the amount of that surplus being known, it is incumbent on Parliament to come to a decision as to what objects it should be applied. It would be unjust to allow so large a sum of money, capable of being utilised with so much benefit to Irish interests,



to lie idle and unproductive, and to resemble the talent wrapped in a napkin and buried in the earth.

No question calls so loudly for the immediate and careful attention of Parliament as the question of higher education in Ireland. This is also a question, legislation on which will involve considerable expenditure of money. There might be a reluctance at the present moment to make any large addition to the education votes, already so enormous. The inference I wish to establish is easy to draw.

Inquiry will discover that nearly all the proposals and suggestions I have ventured to make are based on recommendations of the Reports of three Royal Commissions and of a Committee of the House of Commons.

Believe me to remain,

Very sincerely yours,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

SIR J. BERNARD BURKE, C.B.,

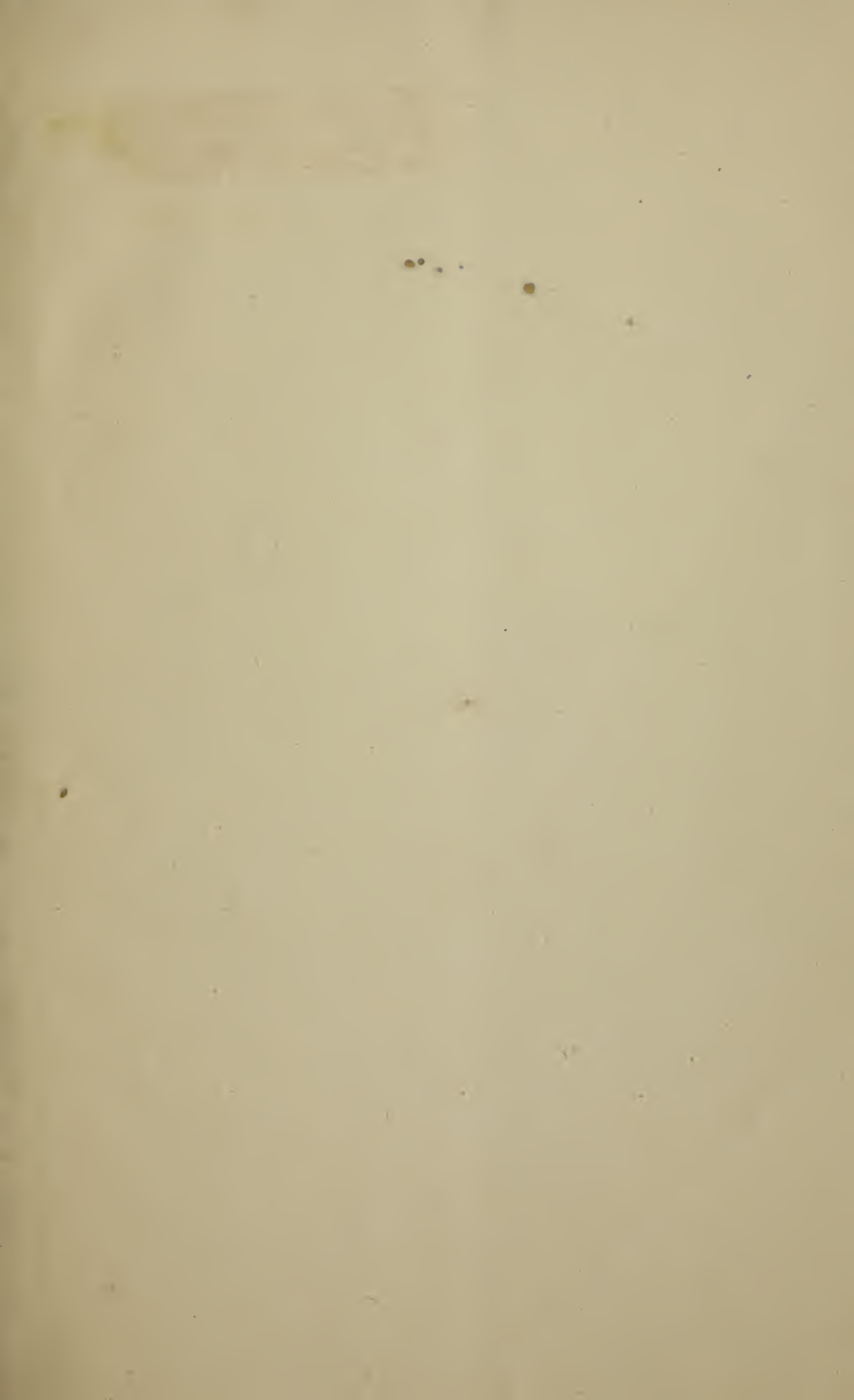
ULSTER.

PHOENIX PARK,

*December, 1877.*

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